

## **Seamstress for the Band** by **500NightsOfHolmes**

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**Summary:** Ruth Warren (nee Wheeler) is the aunt of Mike and Nancy, and sister of Ted. She's also the lackey of Hopper at the station. But when it comes down to it, who needs who more? He doesn't know what he's got until it's gone. It's going to get a whole lot stranger. (T for Language. Expect some Mileven fluff in upcoming chapters! Read and Review! My first story for almost a year!)

## 1. Chapter 1

August 23rd 1981

Hawkins Police Department

Hawkins, IN

Lunch-Time

It had been a waiting game all day. The minutes ticked by and they felt like long, hard hours. There had been a crash. An airplane crash. And her husband was on it. Whilst sitting with her lunch in front of her on the tired, oak table, Warren (nee Wheeler) had her hand firmly on top of her fully-bloomed pregnancy bump. There wasn't long to go now, maybe a month or so, but it was supposed to happen when they were together. And now there was doubt. Millions of irrational thoughts went around and around her head. She knew in her gut she would have to do this alone. Each person who came into the break-room made Ruth look up quickly. Many of them shook their heads. There had been no news. The crash happened not long after take-off from Denver. He was due to be home by at least dinner-time. They were going to decorate the baby's room on the weekend. They had their paints and they had their borders. But Ruth knew. She was just waiting for somebody to prove her wrong.

Outside of the break-room, Flo was waiting eagerly by the telephone for news. Ruth watched through the shutters and her ears were on high alert for the telephone.

It rang. But it was nothing. Nothing that mattered.

"Hey!" a deputy barged in and held the door open for Ruth, "I think you'll wanna see this."

She got to her feet and followed close behind to the television on the deputy's desk. The news had been reporting on the crash since it happened and now they were getting somewhere. It came to light that as the plane became higher, there had been a fault with the workings of the switchboard. Communication was lost almost immediately after the failure and the pilot had been flying blind. Due to make an emergency landing, pressure dropped and engines failed. There was no power. The plane took a staggering fifteen-thousand feet nosedive to the ground below. There had been no survivors.

The news mumbled on and she stood by the deputy's desk, holding herself up with the edge. Her heart raced and her insides were hollow. She could only feel her baby move to know that this was real and happening.

The entire department gathered around the television and watched on as the horrors unfolded from the scene. Luggage was recovered and identities but she couldn't look. Ruth had many apologies and condolences but nothing could mend what was torn apart in front of her.

Five o'clock came and went. Ruth waited for an appearance from Jim. He would be able to let her go and be with her family. He'd let her take her time and get back on her feet.

His door had been closed and nobody had seen him for a day or so. She had so many preparations and arrangements to make. It was silly that she was even still at work. She took her chances and went from her desk to his office, opening the door and closing it behind her quickly. Ruth stood timid, wringing her hands off one another. The room was cold, dark. It stank of cigarettes, the strong ones that Jim smoked. He was kicked back in his chair, his hat over his face. How long had he been sleeping? Ruth walked around the desk, cigarette butts pressed into the floor under her loafers. In the few years she had been working for the police department, Jim hadn't said much to her directly- to anybody really. He had just lost his daughter not long ago and hadn't been taking it very well. This was exactly the reason Ruth had to talk to him directly.

"Chief?" She asked quietly, knocking one of his legs with her hand. He grumbled. "Chief. I gotta talk to you."

He didn't make much movement except take a big deep breath. Ruth straightened up and sat across from him. "Listen... I gotta, I gotta take some time off, Chief. I can't be here."

"No." Plain and easy the way it rolled out of his mouth. Ruth blinked and thought. "We need you here."

"But, Chief, it's Larry... He's-" She had to stop herself from crying. She wanted a quick and easy transition out of this place but even saying his name. It crushed her.

"Dead... You can't leave. We need you here." Jim repeated himself but

this just pushed the tears from her eyes. Her nose tingled and her throat was hot and raw. This was anger. An expression, an emotion that Ruth rarely felt. It took a lot to rile her up. But the arrogance before her brought it right out.

"I have to be with Karen and Ted and the kids! I have a funeral to plan, Jim! God damn, what- what? Just because you didn't leave work after Sarah died-"

"Don't say her name!" Jim abruptly brought his legs down and took his hat from his face, "You're not going anywhere. We don't have any other temps here-"

"Jim, I haven't been a temp for a year! I've been your run-around for the last six-months! Before that, I was in archives! Do you get this?! I have been there for you, I've ran your errands when you were in the hospital with her! I went to call-outs when you couldn't- which I'm not even trained to do- and now, I can't! I physically can't any more. I need you to give me this, please, Jim." Ruth pleaded before him, tears falling quickly from her lashes but he wasn't budging.

"Wait for your maternity to come through-"

"Jim... It starts in two weeks. I'm asking you for a two week advance to plan my husbands funeral! If it's so important, I will come back two weeks earlier- You know what?" Ruth got to her feet and opened up the door, letting the light from the office into his dank, deep room, "I thought you would help me. I thought you would understand. Consider this my notice. Find someone else to get your smokes." She left the door open and grabbed her coat from the back of her chair at the other end of the office. She gave small good-byes to a select few and promised to bring the baby 'round once they were born. Everyone understood.

## 2. Chapter 2

Three Years Later  
October 30th 1984  
Melvald's Store

The store had been quiet all week and with the run-up to Halloween, business should have been a bit quicker. All day there had been only three customers and they only came to fill their prescriptions. On the particularly sunny day, Ruth sat by her cash register and studied her crossword puzzle. She thought hard about the groceries she was due to buy later on once she picked up her son from daycare. Jamie had just turned three and was such a bright boy. He was so clever and barely had any attitude. He did ask for his daddy though which broke Ruth's heart every time. He was 'up in the clouds'. That's what she would tell him; that he's watching over them and looking at his son growing. Jamie was starting to look like his father more and more each day and Ruth would be damned should any harm come to her final remaining piece of Larry. *He* was her life now.

The doors to the store slid open and Bob swanned in from outside. HE looked around the store and his eyes settled on Ruth. Smiling, he headed over to her. Ruth liked Bob's company; he was funny and familiar, a guy who was just easy to talk to. There wasn't many of them in this town. Bob landed by the cash register and slipped the paper out from under her hands. His eyes scanned the words and clue and darted back and forth.

"Seven-down. 'Eleven'." He smiled, turning it back to her and pointing at the shaded in boxes. Ruth scoffed and scribbled in the words before she could have the chance to forget. "How's it been in here? How's the little guy doing too?" Bob was a kind man and he cared about others, even if he didn't know them very well. But everybody knew Bob and everybody loved him.

"He's fine. He's fine, we gotta get some groceries, so, when I'm done here, I'll go and relieve Nancy of her babysitting duties and maybe take him to the park before dinner. And in here? I'm ready to throw this register through the window. It's dull as shit in here this week."

This made Bob laugh but he was quick on the uptake, "How's the pre-

school goin'? Has he settled in alright? I know you were talkin' to Joyce about it; she mentioned it the other night." Bob's eyes kept on roaming the store looking for Joyce but Ruth was just happy there was somebody else to talk to, so she took him up on it.

"Well, yeah, y'know, he's a good boy and stuff but I can't afford more than the two days a week. God knows I'm tryin' here. So the two days he's there, I'm here trying to pay for every other bill that comes through my door and when I'm not in here, I'm with him trying to start the homeschooling. I can't afford a real Kindergarten, it's just hard. But, we're getting there. At least he's with other kids now. And there's food on the table so we'll just get along and see where we end up."

"My sister-in-law, her daughter runs a kindergarten out of her home after school. She's only seventeen but she wants to work with the kids, y'know? All above board; A career. She's just starting so it's not as pricey as probably the place little Jamie's in right now and I think she goes right up until the first grade. I could tell her you were interested, get her number? If it'll maybe save some pennies?"

"Aw, Bob, that'd be great. Thank you. Thank you, that's great. Just let me know."

"Yeah, it's fine. She's up on Maple and Cherry so probably about five minutes from here-" As Bob spoke, Joyce emerged from the washroom, drying her hands with paper-towels. Before long, the pair were gone on a quiet lunch date to the parking lot where they sat on the hood of Joyce's car and ate their bagged lunches together. Bob would come from across town just to sit with her for forty-five minutes and leave again. Someone had to watch the store and Ruth was happy to take her lunch behind the pharmacy counter. They had more space back there. She spread out her own lunch that wasn't very impressive. Reese's Pieces, a half bag of chips and diet-Rite. After all, Jamie had to get the best food. He had to be taken care of more than she did and besides, she could survive off some candy until dinner. The Pieces were rationed throughout her lunch, after the chips, two before the soda and the rest after she finished that. Her sugar high could see her through the rest of the day probably.

"Hello?! Doors open but nobody's workin'!?" There was a slamming

coming from the cash register at the front of the store and Ruth got up to her feet, looking over the small aisles and shelves to her perch by the door. She sighed and closed over her magazine.

"We're on lunch!" She called back and sat back down. It didn't deter the voice or the foot tapping that echoed through the empty store. Ruth climbed over the pharmacy counter, grumbling under her breath, ready to give this guy a piece of her mind. Everybody can eat lunch but her! Great! "God-damn, I said we're on lunch and bread delivery isn't 'til five if that's what's twisting your drawers!" She weaved in and out of the shelves and came to her register. Her eyes slumped into slits and her nostrils flared slightly with the appearance. "Jim."

"Oh, uh, is Joyce here?"

"She's on lunch. Won't be back for a while."

It was bitter and almost a little awkward. In the years that had passed, Ruth still waited for her apology. She was due it. Never before had it only been the two of them alone or their passings in the street were so fleeting there was barely time for interaction.

Ruth avoided looking at him and started to quietly pick a scabbed sticker from the under side of the register that hung slightly over the counter edge. Jim looked directly at her and he huffed loud enough for her eyes to slightly look up. The thought of apologising to a woman who helped him in his darkest times had skimmed over his thoughts a few times; It was just that his pride always got the better of him. Ruth had always been a loyal accomplice and a dedicated worker. But in the moment, Jim felt his attitude was fully justifiable. Maybe not so much now. Truth be told, he tried to avoid her and the situation at all costs and had done for some time. But here, in this moment, he supposed it couldn't hurt to maybe try it.

He amped himself up and took his sunglasses off his face, chewing the inside of his cheek anxiously.

"Look, uh-"

"Don't bother. If you're going to say you're sorry, just don't. I don't

care. It's too late to make it better. It's done." Ruth beat him to it and went to get up from her chair, returning to her position behind the pharmacy counter. Jim stood and watched her walk away. No, he was going to get this out there. He followed behind her and stood by the cigarettes at the end of the counter,

"Look, it wasn't fair," he began, folding the legs of his sunglasses over on top of each other.

"Jim, stop. It's too late. Larry got buried a week after I left. It's done. I got the time off-"

"No, I should've gave you it-"

"Yeah, you should have! I needed you! Like you needed me to look after the place while Sarah was in and out of hospital! Can I say her name now?" Ruth's anger from deep-roots came forth and she was starting to shake and stutter with her frustration and anger, "Jim, I needed to be with my family and you were willing to stand in the way of that. If I hadn't served my notice, Larry's death would've ate me up inside. I would have been there until I had Jamie and I wouldn't have had time to heal! I wouldn't have worked the way that you so desperately wanted me to! You were willing to let his death torture me. I don't want to hear what you have to say. Not anymore." She was getting more upset now, not even being able to keep still by her purse on the floor. She moved back and forth, from one foot to the next, just hovering. "I done everything you asked me to do. Every little thing for you and your wife-"

"I know and that's why I'm here to fix it-"

"Why? After three years you now realise how much of an ass you were? Leave it alone, now. I thought I deserved it from you but you haven't even cared enough to come to me before now. So, I healed and you know what? I forgive you. You were having a hard time, I know you were. And I get it."

"And I shouldn't have let that fall onto you; that's what I am trying to fix now! i get that I was a dick! Why are you making this so difficult!?"

Ruth looked up at him and shook her head.

*"Three years, Chief. It took you three years to get balls and confront me about it... Please... get out of the store... and leave me alone."* She spoke slowly and looked at him directly, her eyes burning from tears that pushed their way out. Jim locked onto her eyes and he nodded, swallowing hard and exhaling slowly. He turned on his heels and headed for the door, not looking back once, even once he hopped back into his truck; he didn't dally. The engine roared to life and he was gone.

### 3. Chapter 3

Later

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That night, she had called Ted not long after they returned home from grocery shopping. She needed a night for herself; her meeting with Jim stuck in her throat and was due a break. Karen stopped by with Holly to pick up Jamie and he gave his mama a kiss and cuddle goodbye and goodnight. She called to him from the porch that she would pick him up in the morning and they could go to the fairground for Halloween that night. He was too young for trick or treating so a promise of pumpkin carving and candy eating with his mom would be good enough for him. She closed the door over as her family made their way onto the road and she sighed, exhausted and conflicted. Eyes met the phone but she wouldn't call. The clock barely reached six o'clock before she had run a bath. There was no time wasting. Her clothes were piled into the washer and she made her way to the bathroom. When Jamie wasn't home, it was quiet. Ruth knew she should enjoy the peace and quiet but she had been so used to being busy and on the go for so long. The entire time she spent soaking and trying to relax, she was thinking. Her mind was too busy to let her relax. The way she handled things today and three years ago; it could've been done better. It could've been done with more tact and delicacy. She made it out that Jim done nothing for her. He always saw that she had her days off for doctor appointments and dental appointments and weekends off to spend with Larry. She didn't mean to seem ungrateful. Her mind was loud in her ears and all she could hear was how ungrateful she sounded. It was pitiful.

Time came for her to get dressed and she did, pulling on pyjamas and getting wine from the fridge. She gathered her supplies for the evening and made way into her empty bedroom, once full of love and happiness and excitement. She lay quietly and tried to read though one of her books before falling asleep just shy of eight o'clock.

Across town, Jim had his dinner cooking on the stove. Silence was his solace. In a town that had seen horrors and more deaths than any other, he enjoyed the silence. As the pot bubbled, Jim investigated

the closed bedroom door. Her body was small in the bed and she breathed quietly into herself, sleeping soundly. Her dinner plate was already in the sink so at least she had been fed. She had probably tried to contact Mike again but when he was out of the house, it was hard and that made it difficult for Jane to move on.

Jim closed the door over after turning off the bedside lamp and placing his hand softly on her rich, curly hair and started to think by the stove again. Something he didn't like doing but couldn't stop.

Jamie was a nice name; it was a great name for a great kid, he imagined. He wouldn't know, he'd never met the kid. Not long after the kid was born, Ruth had came into the office and Jim couldn't bear to look. Sarah was fresh and still wounding his mind. He sat at his small kitchenette bar and remembered the day she came into the office with this ball of mush and fuzz wrapped in the softest blanket. It never made noise, never gurgled or cooed. The office had swarmed two or three at a time, they made her coffee and let her heat up the bottle. Jim just stayed very still in his office, his hands on his desk, watching through his slatted shutters. He remembered how he rubbed his face in thought, debating going over and trying to heal the rift.

The phone ringing stirred his mind and brought him back to reality. He dashed over and answered it quickly so not to wake Jane.

"Hopper."

*"Uh, Chief, you gotta call the mayor, man."*

"Why? Wh-why would I have to do that?" He whispered down the phone, "I'm off-duty."

*"Yeah, tomorrow you're not. He wants you at city hall for the Halloween fayre."*

Jim put his face in his free hand and sighed heavily.

"You know what this is, don't you?"

*"I dunno, Chief?"*

"This goddamn election next month. He wants to look good."

*"Look, Chief, he wants you to call him. I'm goin' to bed."*

"Alright. Bye." He put the phone on the receiver and went to the stove. The gas turned off and he pulled a glass from the drainer. Scotch was already under the coffee table waiting for him to finish his supper and laze on the couch. Moving back to the telephone, he grabbed the bottle and pulled over one of the dining chairs. Jim knew he was in for a long night when the mayor wanted to talk.

The next day, Ruth had been up for hours and was already on her way into town in time for all the stores opening. She had been in the routine for so long with Jamie and with him out of the house, it was like muscle memory for her. She made her way to the market, picking up an autumnal spray basket of flowers and a birthday card. She wrote the card in her car and made her way over to the station. It was bright outside and the air was crisp but the sun was strong, barely a cloud in the sky. The streets were quiet at this time of the morning, Hawkins was a lazy town. A sleepy town. Ruth had a quick cigarette by the car, watching out for anybody who might see her. Ruth had barely smoked but since the first anniversary of Larry, she couldn't help it. She wasn't an exclusive smoker, her brother always telling her how disgusting a habit it was and telling her horror stories about it when she was in middle school.

The butt was thrown down and she took the flowers into the station. Flo was by her desk and was glad to see Ruth.

"Happy birthday! I didn't forget this year!"

"Nonsense. They're beautiful. Thank you." Flo brought her in for a hug but Ruth pulled back quickly,

"Your card. It's in the car. Two seconds. Give me two seconds then I'll take you out for breakfast, huh?" Ruth smiled and made her way back out to the parking lot. Jim's truck had just pulled in so she had to be fast. She heard the radio turn off and the door slam. His heavy feet came closer to the car, almost bypassing her completely.

"Hey, what you doin' here?" His voice came from behind and she held

the card tightly in her hand. The morning had been so perfect. Ruth shuffled backwards out of the passenger door where he was standing, lighting a cigarette. A strong cigarette.

"I'm taking Flo out for her birthday. It's today."

Jim's face fell and his eyes flickered over to the station door. "What? Did you forget again?" She locked her car and walked ahead of him.

"Fine, I did." He grumbled, kicking his feet into the stone steps. Jim didn't waste time in talking, he made a direct bee-line for his office and closed the door. Ruth pushed it to the back of her mind and focused on Flo's breakfast.

"Come on. We'll go to Sandra's. I know you like that place."

"But, the Chief-'m

"Forget him for now. He's fine, he's a big boy. He can get his own coffee this morning." Ruth smiled and grabbed her friend's coat from the rack, holding the door open for her.

The ride over was nice, they talked about Jamie and Flo's new grandchild. A girl. Patricia. According to Flo, she looked just like her father. She put it down to the strong genes in her side of the family.

Breakfast came in the quiet café and they enjoyed it thoroughly. They talked as if Ruth had never been gone. Of course they both knew how wrong that was. Ruth had been biting her tongue and trying not to pry but she cared too much to keep ignoring it.

"And, Jim? Ho-how's he been?"

"Oh, well, it's been hard. It's been quiet. Some days he's just in that office with the radio on. Other days he's out from eight o'clock and doesn't come back until closing time."

It seemed like he didn't even want to be in that place anymore. He was trying to keep away and avoid it at all costs. "Some days, he won't even radio back. Last year, when the Byers boy went missing, Jim was out every day and every night looking for him. Probably without Sarah, he wanted to help someone else's child. It was a hard

year in that station. Constant reminders everywhere for him but he came out the other side. And the Byers boy was found safe."

"Yeah, I heard. Joyce couldn't stop. She was never at work but, I didn't mind. I knew she was out looking for him. God, it must have been rough. At least she had the best person helping her."

Flo felt around the top of her coffee cup with her finger and smiled to herself. She reached her hand out slightly on the table to Ruth,

"He has asked about getting you back in here. You were the right-hand for so long. To be quite frank, he was a bit lost. Then he got a temp..." Flo sipped her hot filter coffee and looked out of the window to the rising sun. Ruth felt slightly uplifted.

"Well, I can't say that I've not missed it. There's just too much there, y'know? And besides, I'm getting Jamie through school. This jobs doing that." She tried to make her job seem better than it was. It covered bills and food but after that; it was hard.

The waitress came by with the bill and Ruth swore to pay it, regretting none of it but knowing that she'll go without some things because of it. That was just the way of life now.

The ride back to the station was settled and relaxed. They spoke about the Halloween Fayre in town square that night. Flo's husband had a cider stand set up for the night and Ruth promised she would stop by and say hi to him. She was going with Jamie and Holly to give Ted and Karen a night together without the kids. She was happy to do it